Self-Protective Coping with Acquaintance Sexual Aggression: Analysis of Risk and Protective Factors

Based on the work of Rebecca Macy, PhD. Assistant Professor, UNC School of Social Work
Paula Nurius, PhD., and Jeanette Norris, Ph.D.
Presentation developed by Anna Scheyett, MSW

Risk and Protective Factors in Acquaintance Sexual Aggression (ASA)

- Victimization history (Arata, 2000)
- Alcohol use (Ullman, Karabatsos, & Koss, 1999)
- Positive relationship expectancies about the man (Nurius & Norris, 1995)
- Assertiveness (Ullman, 1998)
Appraisal Based Coping and ASA

- Stress and coping theory
- Appraisals and emotions influence behavioral responses
- What is the coping process?
  - Primary appraisal: Is something unexpected here?
  - Secondary appraisal: Nature of threat, coping potential, possible outcomes
  - Emotions: Stemming from appraisals
  - Behaviors: In response to appraisals and emotions
Risk and Protective Functions of Appraisals and Emotions

- Increasing likelihood of assertive response:
  - Anger
  - Confidence
  - Blame of the assailant

- Increasing likelihood of diplomatic response
  - Desire to preserve relationship
  - Sadness
  - Self-blame
Study Question

How do correlates of ASA, specifically

- History of victimization
- Alcohol use
- Relationship expectancies
- Sexual assertiveness

Support or impede self-protective behaviors through the coping process?
Study Design

- Survey of 202 undergraduate women with at least 1 incidence of verbal or physical coerced sexual activity
- Asked to recall most severe incidence of ASA, not family, after age 16, and write narrative account
Survey Measured

- History of sexual aggression
- Alcohol consumption before ASA event
- Relationship expectancies—respect/trust and affection
- Likelihood of using assertive sexual refusal skills
Survey Measured

- Primary appraisal of threatening male behavior: hostile, emotionally manipulative, isolating and controlling
- Secondary appraisal of barriers to responding to threat: alcohol consumption, self-consciousness, concern for relationship, concern for exacerbating injury, self vs man-blame
- Emotional response: anger, sadness, confidence
- Behavioral responses: assertive response, diplomatic resistance
Bivariate Correlations

Victimization history
- Alcohol use (.18, p<.05)
- Sexual assertiveness (-.18, p<.05)
- Primary appraisal, hostility (.33, p<.01)
- Primary appraisal, isolation (.30, p<.01)
- Secondary appraisal, self-blame (.16, p<.05)
- Secondary appraisal, alcohol barrier (.31, p<.01)
- Secondary appraisal, injury (.49, p<.01)
- Emotion, confidence (-.35, p<.01)
- Emotions, sadness (.38, p<.01)
- Behavior response, assertive (.28, p<.01)
Bivariate Correlations

Alcohol use

- Victimization history (.18, p<.05)
- Sexual assertiveness (-.17, p<.05)
- Relationship expectancies (.17, p<.05)
- Primary appraisal, manipulative (-.25, p<.01)
- Secondary appraisal, self-responsible (.17, p<.05)
- Secondary appraisal, alcohol barrier (.68, p<.01)
- Secondary appraisal, harm relationship (-.16, p<.05)
- Emotions, sadness (.15, p<.05)
Bivariate Correlations

Relationship expectancies

- Alcohol use (-.21, p<.01)
- Sexual assertiveness (.17, p<.05)
- Primary appraisal, manipulative (.40, p<.01)
- Secondary appraisal, self responsible (.24, p<.01)
- Secondary appraisal, alcohol barrier (-.17, p<.05)
- Secondary appraisal, self-conscious (.16, p<.05)
- Secondary appraisal, harm relationship (.33, p<.01)
- Emotions, anger (.20, p<.01)
- Behavioral response, diplomatic (.21, p<.01)
Bivariate Correlations

Sexual assertiveness

- Victim history (-.18, p<.05)
- Alcohol use (-.17, p<.05)
- Relationship expectancies (.17, p<.05)
- Secondary appraisal, self-conscious (-.16, p<.05)
- Emotions, confidence (.17, p<.05)
- Emotions, sadness (-.19, p<.01)
Multiple Regression: Primary Appraisal

- Hostility ($R^2 = .12, p < .001$)
  - Victimization history ($r = .34, p < .001$)
- Isolation/Control ($R^2 = .09, p < .01$)
  - Victimization history ($r = .30, p < .001$)
- Manipulation ($R^2 = .19, p < .001$)
  - Alcohol use ($r = -.19, p < .01$)
  - Relationship expectancies ($r = .35, p < .001$)
Multiple Regression: Secondary Appraisal

- **Self Blame** ($R^2 = .13, p < .001$)
  - Alcohol (.20, $p < .01$)
  - Relationship expectancies (.30, $p < .001$)

- **Alcohol as barrier** ($R^2 = .51, p < .001$)
  - Victimization history (.20, $p < .001$)
  - Alcohol (.64, $p < .001$)

- **Self-Consciousness** ($R^2 = .06, p < .05$)
  - Relationship expectancies (.20, $p < .01$)
  - Sexual assertiveness (-.20, $p < .01$)
Multiple Regression: Secondary Appraisal

- Exacerbate injury ($R^2 = .27$, $p < .001$)
  - Victimization history ($r = .50$, $p < .001$)
- Harm relationship ($R^2 = .16$, $p < .001$)
  - Alcohol ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$)
  - Relationship expectancies ($r = .33$, $p < .001$)
  - Sexual assertiveness ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$)
Multiple Regression: Emotions

- Anger ($R^2 = .06$, $p < .05$)
  - Relationship expectancies (-.21, $p < .01$)
- Confidence ($R^2 = .16$, $p < .01$)
  - Victimization history (-.35, $p < .001$)
- Sadness ($R^2 = .18$, $p < .01$)
  - Victimization history (.34, $p < .001$)
Multiple Regression: Behavioral Responses

- Assertive ($R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$)
  - Victimization history ($0.29$, $p < .001$)
- Diplomatic ($R^2 = .06$, $p < .05$)
  - Relationship expectancies ($0.22$, $p < .01$)
Conclusions

- Putative risk factors, on the whole, were
  - Positively related to appraisals, emotions likely to facilitate a diplomatic response, and diplomatic behavioral responses
  - Inversely related to appraisals, emotions likely to facilitate an assertive response, and assertive behavioral responses

- Putative protective factor, on the whole, was
  - Inversely related to appraisals, emotions likely to facilitate a diplomatic response, and diplomatic behavioral responses
  - Positively related to appraisals, emotions likely to facilitate an assertive response, and assertive behavioral responses
Practice implications

- Prevention programs should
  - Include broad-based contextualizing factors likely to facilitate self-protective coping
  - Help women self-regulate emotions to assess and behave in their own best interest early in escalating situations
  - Consider multiple factors women bring to social situations
  - Particularly address the complex responses on women with victimization histories and how prior victimization might help to facilitate assertive responding
References


